TL 3629

ASIAN BUREAU AUSTRALIA NEWSLETTER

CIDAC Centro de Documentação

JUNE 1982

NO 63

Registered by Australia Post
Publication No VAR 0775

EAST TIMOR:
A REFLECTION IN FAITH

This document is part of the reflection of priests, sisters and brothers of religious congregations at the Indonesian Major Religious Superiors Conference (MASRI) last year. It was compiled by the Religious of East Timor for presentation at this conference.

We do not intend giving an analysis of the East Timor problem, but only to reflect together on the faith of the East Timorese people in the actual situation. . . We realise that by simply analysing the problem, we would not be speaking from heart to heart, our communications would still be shallow, and there might easily be misunderstandings which were not desired or which given the impression that we are always complaining or begging. It is true that the East Timorese Church has many needs which cannot be fulfilled even by the Indonesian Church.

. . . We recognise that a sincere communication demands a long process because despite many similarities of community and faith, we have very different backgrounds. We hope our communication will be successful, based on deep reflections from us all, both in our own groups, and as a group together. . . Our co-operation. . . will become a positive contribution to the Indonesian Religious as well as to the religious of East Timor, though there are differences in the history of the Church and its government.

We must all realise that the Indonesian National Army which liberated Indonesia from the colonial power in an astonishing manner will never liberate the people of East Timor from their colonial situation towards autonomy and national independence because our situation and reality are very different.

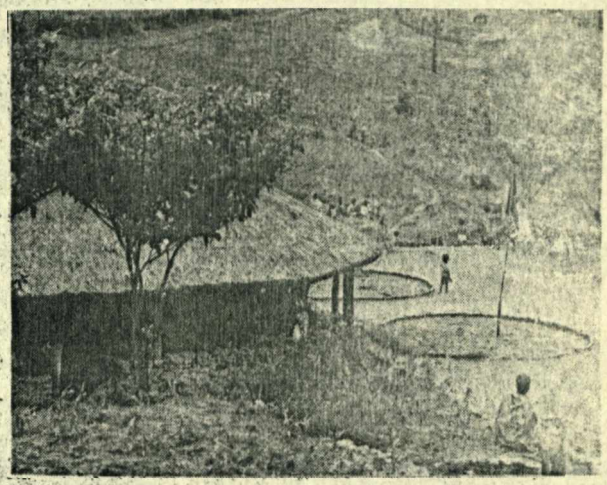
What has taken place during these five years is mostly invasion, war, looting, the destruction of the indigenous population, territorial subjections, colonial exploitation, the expulsion of the indigenous population who are replaced by people from other islands, military occupation and attempts at mass mobilisation of people (from 12 to 55 years) to make war on each other. In fact, the wish and desire of the East Timorese people from the beginning has been the right to determine their own fate and not mass murders such as have been done by their neighbours.

SITUATION AND EMOTIONAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE PEOPLE

The people of East Timor are suffering. They feel themselves misunderstood, although they know what is happending and are aware that they are being humiliated. But they remain in a very clear position concerning their ideals. Their faith stands firm and is strengthened although it is not always able to be expressed in words, but is seen with the eyes of faith by the Religious who accompany the people. The East Timorese religious feel solidarity with the people and because of that feel obliged to express the people's experience of faith. They are in the midst of the people, in a position which helps us to understand and formulate better the faith of the people, particularly because we know the language, beliefs and heart of the people.

That which was feared has truly happened; the people's way of life has been turned upside down and the basis of the community life has been destroyed. Masses of the population have been forced to shift in large numbers to places far away and unknown. This has already happened several times and in the last few months, many East Timorese have been exiled from their own homeland. Consequently, apart from having lost all their possessions, there is alienation and disintegration of families. There are continually new orders from above on 'security' which actually destroys and confuses the people. People who have been concentrated in (certain) areas and who live in dire poverty, in an atmosphere of false peace, have been forced to accompany the army to the mountains. A few months ago some villages were noted which were entirely empty of male inhabitants because all of the male work force was forced to leave their families, houses, fields, and work just to accompany the Indonesian army morning and night for months on end without any medical care and food at all. They were aged 12 to 55. The seriousness of the health and the rebellious mood of those who return to their huts can no longer be denied.

In the meantime those who remain at home are the mothers, wives, daughters and older people who live out their faith in sadness in continual prayer.



. . .we do not yet understand why the Indonesian Church and the Universal Roman Church have up till now not stated openly and officially their solidarity with the Church, people and Religious of East Timor. Perhaps this has been the heaviest blow for us. . .

The people are now experiencing oppression without end, their rights are not acknowledged. The people do not have a voice, and live in fear. Indeed the people live in a situation of continual war, and thus must be silent, and submissive. The produce of their soil is seized, such as coffee, teak, cattle and even their property rights. The army monopolises everything. Confronted by this situation the people do not get an explanation for any of it. Thus they suffer more and feel their faith more.

The people are aware that their faith comes from God whose Word takes the form of social justice. This justice derives from the justice of God in His relations with His people. This justice must be built by the people themselves based on faith and co-operation with God and one' people who are still sacrificed to oppression. For us living the faith without serious endeavours for the building of social justice is making faith merely foreign and mystical. Creating justice together with the present Indonesian government is not possible, or not yet, although the people desire justice greatly. A faith which illumines the minds of the people cannot develop in a Christian action, because social justice has not yet come into being. There is, as yet, no way out from the oppression from above. Because of that we, the religious, must always be alert and thoughtful that the faith of the people is not trodden on.

. . .Those who remain at home are the mothers, wives, daughters and older people who live out their faith in sadness and continual prayer.

COOPERATION WITH THE COMMUNITY AND RELIGIOUS OF INDONESIA

Our connections with the Universal Church, with the Religious and the wider world were suddenly cut off. We are the religius of East Timor who still together with the people were suddenly thrown into emptiness and alientation for six years until we became the silent Church of East Timor.

Now we are more aware of the faith and see that this experience was very useful because our faith was deepened and more felt in life as a gift from God. This faith says that we are still one with the universal Christian Church. It is precisely the dimensions of that universal faith which are being felt and deepened.

We are aware that we were 'persuaded' to have relations with the Indonesian Church which is the nearest Church and which is authorised by the Government and Army to straight away create relations with us. We hope that this 'persuasion' develops an honest meaning, both from our side, the East Timorese Religious as well as from the Indonesian Relgious, all based on a faith which will help us become one religious fellowship in the Church.

It was just with this aim that we wrote these reflections. Only based on honesty, sincerity and openness without prejudice and underhand behaviour can we build the Christian Church upholding the dignity of our people. We cannot put to one side or consider unimportant the misunderstandings and great difficulties which are a consequence of the actions of the government against the people, against the religious, the faithful and the Bishop.

These wounds must be healed via a long process from the two sides on the basis of sincerity in faith, hope and love.

We must also acknowledge that we do not yet understand why the Indonesian Church and the Universal Roman Church have up till now not stated openly and officially their solidarity with the Church, people and Religious of East Timor. Perhaps this has been the heaviest blow for us. . . We felt stunned by this silence which seemed to allow us to die deserted.

Asian Bureau Australia Newsletter

to make Australians more aware of the developing social, economic and religious life in Asia and the Western Pacific.

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